

Testimony of Liz Dupont-Diehl

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March 1, 2023, Education Committee

SB 1096, AN ACT CONCERNING THE CHARTER SCHOOL APPROVAL PROCESS – Oppose

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, and other members of the Committee, my name is Liz Dupont-Diehl and I am the Associate Director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG). On behalf of CCAG and our thousands of member families, we urge you to reject [SB 1096](#) which would take away our democratic oversight over the approval and funding of new charter schools. SB 1096 would eliminate the process of the State Board of Education issuing an initial certificate of approval for a new charter school and to establish a charter school approval grant account for the purpose of funding new charter schools.

Our educational system is already riddled with inequality, driven by decades of institutionalized racism in zoning, redlining, and concentrated poverty. Our overreliance on local property taxes increases this divide with every passing day.

We need to fully fund our public schools and ensure adequate resources in each and every classroom in each and every city and town.

Charter schools do not accept all children. If they are to use public dollars, they need to be subject to Freedom of Information laws, fully accountable to the public, and subject to the same approval and operations rules as public schools.

Keep the existing process, which gives the public and elected legislators a voice. Instead of taking funds out of our schools to fast-track the creation of new charter schools, the legislature should fully fund and staff our schools.

Currently, all public school funding is approved by the legislature, which is elected by voters and hears testimony from the public. Why should we take away that democratic oversight from the legislature and the public, and hand over that decision to an appointed board? The existing process gives the public and elected legislators a voice. SB 1096 would silence our voice. The existing process was established in 2015 because the charter school process was not transparent. Why would we go back?

Under current law, the State Board of Education (SBE) may grant “initial certificates of approval” for charters for local and state charter schools. However, the new school’s initial certificate only becomes effective under the law as a full “charter” if the legislature appropriates funds to the State Department of Education for its operations. The school receives its charter as of July 1 in the fiscal year for which the funds are appropriated.

As of July 1, 2023, the bill allows SBE to grant full charters rather than initial certificates of approval. Additionally, it creates the “charter school approval grant account” within the General Fund to give initial funding to state and local charter schools that have been granted a new charter in the fiscal year immediately following the one in which the charter was granted instead of waiting for the legislature to appropriate the funds. Additionally, the bill prohibits SBE from approving more than two new state charter schools per fiscal year beginning in FY 24.

We need more transparency and accountability of charter schools, not less.

Thank you for your consideration.

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